

House of Illustration Illustrator in Residence 2018/19

Report for the Barbara and Philip Denny Trust June 2019

YiMiao Shih was the winner of the House of Illustration Residency in 2018 – our fifth resident since the programme began in 2014.

YiMiao Shih was born in 1985 in Taiwan. She holds a BFA in Fine Art from National Taiwan Normal University (Taipei, Taiwan) and received her MA at Royal College of Art, London where she currently lives and works. Her practice includes drawing, embroidery as well as video work.

'Using House of Illustration and its audiences both physically and digitally as an observational hub, I feel I finally put some actual flesh on the bones for what I have been longing to work on - the subject of Brexit. A year before I started the Residency I made my first Brexit-themed embroidery piece which, with a little luck, ended up in RA250 summer exhibition. Thereafter, I wanted to properly develop the subject into a full scale exhibition.. and this year we had the show Rabbrexit Means Rabbrexit opening at House of Illustration!

With the Residency, I have gained the time, space and support from the team at HOI to fulfil my dream. It is truly an extraordinary experience for me to be able to document the political and social 'now' in times of Brexit, being able to express the subject in a witty and satirical way, and I know that illustration will be a great medium for the approach. The Residency at House of Illustration has been the perfect opportunity for me.' **YiMiao Shih, June 2019**



YiMiao Shih: Rabbrexit Means Rabbrexit

In 2016 the UK's electorate was asked to vote on whether the country remained a member of the European Union, or left it. Almost 52% of participants were in favour of withdrawing from the EU. The political, social and emotional wrangling caused by this result and negotiations on the terms of Britain's exit (Brexit) are the basis of YiMiao Shih's latest work.

During a six-month residency at House of Illustration, Shih hosted discussions on Brexit in creative workshops and via social media. At the same time, she closely monitored mainstream news coverage and grass-roots debate. Shih's findings have informed her fictional narrative about a parallel universe in which, rather than rejecting its connection with mainland Europe, the UK votes for 'Rabbrexit': the expulsion of rabbits from the country.

For *Rabbrexit Means Rabbrexit*, Shih has created a series of 'relics' from the UK's imaginary rabbit population, including large-scale embroidered epics, newly minted 52p and 48p coins and aeroplane landing cards for rabbits stripped of their British citizenship. These satirical pieces draw together Shih's real-world observations of the nationalistic fervor, economic uncertainty and fragmentation of societal bonds brought about by Brexit.

YiMiao's residency included the following activity:

- House of Illustration Instagram posts and story takeover during residency, for gathering thoughts from HOI audience as part of the project research
- Two Drawing Headlines events held at HOI, as means to explore the subject with public engagement - with tea, biscuits and drawing tools
- Met up with Punch magazine cartoon archiver Helen Walasek for research on satirical graphics
- Research trips to British Museum exhibition 'I Object', British Library 'Anglo Saxon kingdoms: art, word, war', Tate Modern 'Anni Albers' and Embroidert studio at Royal School of Needle work
- Research trip for Irish embroidery machine in Hackney; trips to engraving and casting studios based in Hatton garden
- Final exhibition showcasing the outcome of six-month residency research and artwork
- Participant of a panel talk with Katie Nairn (Assistant Curator) and Paul Gravett (Co-Curator of current *Posy Simmonds; A Retrospective* exhibition) at East London Comics and Art Festival on 7th June
- Evening talk at HOI on the final exhibition work on 3rd July
- Exhibition Tour for HOI volunteers
- A masterclass at HOI, Wearable Narrative: drawing, collating and heat transfer printing on recycled clothing 6th July

Illustrator in Residence Programme 2018/19

YiMiao Shih - Evaluation Questionnaire

1. How did you find the application and selection process for the Residency? Is there any way that it could have been improved?

I found the application and selection process very clear, with no confusion or difficulty. The timeline for submission, from the first proposal to announcing the short list, interview time and final announcement was, in my opinion, very well organised. I think the selection process and how it works were very well explained through the application rules and via associated emails.

2. Do you think the time scale and bursary were adequate for the realisation of your project?

I think in terms of a six-month Residency, the timescale and bursary were both adequate for the realisation of the project. The bursary was a very generous support for me which allowed me to take time and money to explore and experiment. I noticed that, since my subject was very

current-event related, it was challenging to narrow down and organise my ideas since everyday there was a new development regarding Brexit. It was the first time I worked on a subject that changes and develops its shape whilst I tried to observe and get a personal view on it.

I think that nature of the subject made it take longer than I expected to digest all observations and refine my thinking. As a result, I felt in the end my production time wasn't really sufficient to finalise my ideas without rushing.

3. How did you feel about the support you received whilst on the Residency from House of Illustration? Could anything have been changed to improve it?

The support from House of Illustration is immense and I couldn't thank everyone enough for their kind and genuine support and friendship during my Residency. I feel it's not only the inspirational or practical support but also emotional. It is like being with an extended family of people you could turn to for anything around the creation of the exhibition. The only thing I would liked to have done more of is professional networking with the remarkable ambassadors/Trustees of House of Illustration!

4. What are the main benefits that the residency has brought you? This might include development of illustration practice, time to explore, confidence, raised profile, etc.

The major benefits that the residency has brought me are the time to develop a project and a place to showcase the final outcome, as well as critical financial support. It is such a luxury to have appropriate and earmarked time to generate a body of work which is expected to be showcased through exhibition - it gives the body of work a very strong structure and capacity for expressing the subject thoroughly. With the ample space and funding, as a practitioner I was able to throw myself into the project without too much worry. The only downside is that I have enjoyed the residency so much, I have secretly wished it could last for more than half a year!

5. How do you feel about the body of work you have produced during your Residency?

I am very satisfied with the body of work I have created during my Residency. I have been excited at using different materials to express the subject, which wasn't really my first plan when I applied. I kept an open mind about the techniques I might want to apply whilst exploring my concept, but I was expecting to primarily do embroidery-based work.

I was surprised in the end to have used heat transfer print, glass engraving, laser engraving on silver plate, moulding and casting and black gold plating on metals – processes which were simply a pleasure for me during the final months of making. I am glad to see the fictional world of 'Rabbrexit' somehow really seems to now exist through being displayed across the various artifacts. Most importantly, I was hoping to bring a laugh to the audience even though the subject is challenging in real life, and when I look at the work I think I have achieved this to a point.

6. Do you think the residency will have a long-term impact on your work? Might you extend the project, or approach future projects in new ways for example?

I have no doubt that the residency will have a significant long-term impact on my work. In terms of subject development, it has offered me time, a great platform and a generous space for ideas to be tested and grown, and my process has evolved as a result. I have experienced many ideas and discussions surrounding the subject and developed a very organic form of evolving my own thoughts and ideas, through chatting with staff and visitors in parallel with experimenting with new techniques in order to fulfil the concept.

The Residency upgraded my approach towards a subject I had previously begun to explore, developing it into a multi-angled perspective and a more intricate exploration of some of the details around Brexit. I intend to carry on developing this subject in the future.

7. Have you made any helpful new contacts as part of the residency? Perhaps people who might commission you, or that you might collaborate with in future, etc.

I haven't yet made new contacts who might commission me, since the exhibition opened last month. It will be interesting to see if, during the life of the exhibition, other opportunities arise on this front!

8. Have you developed any new skills that aren't related to your illustration practice? If so, what are they?

I have certainly developed new skills that aren't part of my previous practice. For example, the laser engraving of coins is one of the most exciting new skills I have explored during the Residency. It allowed me to calculate the layers of illustration can give to mimic real coin aesthetics, and at the same time to stress the quality and unique strength that illustration can give when translated into an object.

I have never used heat transfer print before - the technique requires an initial painting followed by printing it onto the desired surface. All the images needed to be planned in reverse – creating a surprising result when I gradually applied my paintings onto the fabric.

9. Would you recommend the Residency to other illustrators? If so, what would you say about it?

I would highly recommend the Residency to illustrators and graphic art practitioners. It gives the practitioner a solid period of time to work on a project from concept to final outcome. The opportunities provided by the residency are immense, especially if the practitioner would like to challenge the current definitions of illustration and its current boundaries. With the support from the only public illustration and graphic art gallery in the UK, the practitioner can really explore the subject within the context of House of Illustration and its targeted audience. It is a hub where you meet like-minded people and can exchange thoughts about illustration and its potential as an art-form. It is a rare chance to own the space and time for a significant project, as well as to be exhibited in a particularly relevant context.

10. What will you do next?

I am still thinking of pursuing gallery-based illustration, to explore how this could develop. I plan to keep my eyes peeled on the developing subject matter of the Residency, to observe a post-Brexit (post Rabbrexit?) political and social atmosphere in the UK. I also intend to explore and study the techniques I used for the project in more depth, particularly embroidery, where I'm interested in learning more about traditional hand stitches and Goldwork.

YiMiao Shih 2019

"A stroke of satirical genius... Hop along and go see." Time Out

"Both fresh and affecting." Standpoint

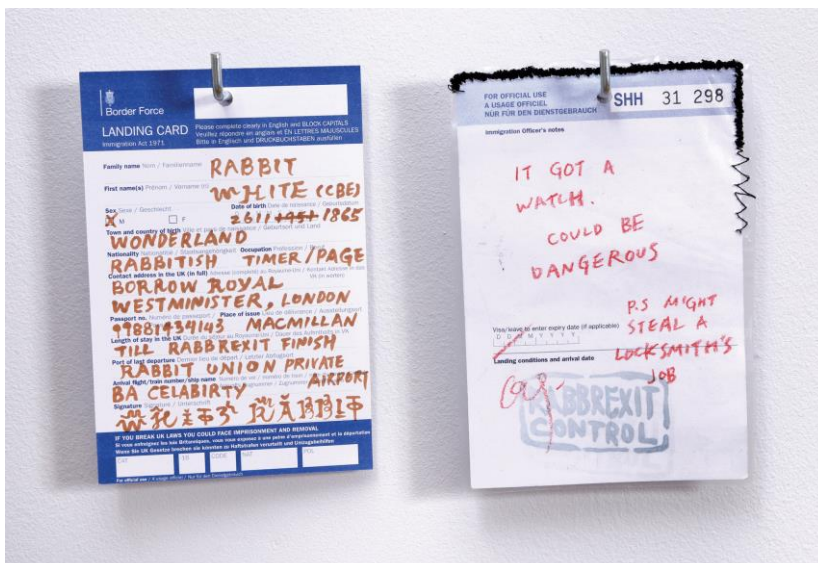
"A glorious and much-needed laugh in the gathering dark." Brian Sibley

Some images from YiMiao Shih: *Rabbrexit Means Rabbrexit*



Detail from 'A Manual of Rabbrexit'

Rabbrexit 48 and 52 pence pieces



Detail of Rabbrexit Landing Cards and Customs documentation